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# Industrial Disputes, Australia methodology

Reference period December 2023

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## Introduction

Statistics on the number of industrial disputes, working days lost and employees involved in industrial disputes are obtained from the Industrial Disputes (ID) collection.

## Concepts, sources and methods

Statistics on industrial disputes are based on concepts and definitions outlined in international guidelines adopted by the 1993 International Conference of Labour Statisticians. Descriptions of the underlying concepts of Australia's industrial disputes statistics, and the sources and methods used in compiling these estimates, are presented in [Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/labour-statistics-concepts-sources-and-methods/2021\)](#), which is available on the ABS web site.

## Scope

Industrial disputes are included within the scope of the ID collection if the work stoppages amount to 10 or more working days lost within a month. Ten working days lost is equivalent to the amount of ordinary time which would have been worked, for example, during a stoppage of work by 10 employees for one day, or, by 40 workers attending a two hour stop work meeting (assuming they worked an eight hour day). Disputes which involve the equivalent of less than 10 working days lost are excluded.

The following types of industrial disputes are within the scope of the ID collection:

- unauthorised stopwork meetings;
- general strikes;
- sympathetic strikes (e.g. strikes in support of a group of workers already on strike);
- political or protest strikes;
- rotating or revolving strikes (i.e. strikes which occur when workers at different locations take turns to stop work);
- unofficial strikes; and
- work stoppages initiated by employers (e.g. lockouts).

Excluded from the scope of the collection are work-to-rules, go-slows and bans (e.g. overtime bans). Also excluded are effects of disputes on locations other than where the stoppages occurred, such as stand-downs because of lack of materials, disruption of transport services and power cuts.

In addition, if all of the employees involved in an industrial dispute resign, that dispute is deemed to be resolved and it is excluded from the scope of the collection from the date of the employment termination.

## Collection methodology

A list of organisations whose employees were involved in industrial disputes is compiled monthly. Statistics on industrial disputes are based on all disputes identified which occurred during the period. Disputes are identified through a range of sources, including media reports, listings obtained from the Fair Work Commission (FWC), state industrial relations commissions, and contact with government organisations, businesses, employer associations and trade unions. Although every attempt is made to identify all disputes that occurred in the month, some small disputes may not be identified through the sources available.

Once all disputes for a month are identified, additional information on the nature and extent of each dispute is obtained through a questionnaire, usually to employers, on the nature and extent of the dispute. Telephone follow up and some written reminders of outstanding returns are undertaken after the due date. If partial responses are received some data, e.g. working days lost in a particular strike, may be imputed. Due to the imputation procedures and the limitations on identification of disputes, the statistics should not be regarded as an exact measure of the extent of industrial disputation.

A dispute affecting several locations is counted as a single dispute if it is organised or directed by the same organisation (e.g. a trade union) or person; otherwise it is counted as a separate dispute at each location where it occurred.

A dispute affecting more than one state and/or industry is counted in each state and/or industry in which it occurred, but only once for Australia in total and for the total of all industries.

When there is a return to work between stoppages over the same issue, and the return to work is for less than two complete months, the stoppages are counted as a single dispute. When the return to work is for two or more months, the dispute is considered to have ended at the time of the return to work. Should a subsequent stoppage occur, it is counted as a new dispute.

Due to the 'two month rule' explained above, data relating to disputes which ended in the quarter can not be finalised until two months have elapsed without further industrial action. Consequently the publication of data for disputes which ended during the quarter has been lagged by one quarter.

## Classifications

Data classified by industry is primarily based on the main activity of the employer of the employees involved in the dispute at the location or site where the industrial dispute occurred.

The March quarter 2009 was the first quarter to be published solely on the basis of [Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification \(ANZSIC\), 2006 \(/statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-industrial-classification-anzsic/latest-release\)](#) edition. This edition replaced the 1993 edition which had been in use since 1994. The 2006 edition of ANZSIC was developed to provide a more contemporary industrial classification system taking into account issues such as changes in the structure and composition of the economy, changing user demands and compatibility with major international classification standards.

Data for all quarters of 2008 are available on the basis of both editions of ANZSIC. Industry data up to December quarter 2007 are only available on an ANZSIC 1993 basis.

For more information on the industry classification, refer to [Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification \(ANZSIC\), 2006 \(/statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-industrial-classification-anzsic/latest-release\)](#).

Data classified by state/territory is based on the location or site where the industrial dispute occurred. Disputes that occur in the Australian territories of Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands are classified to the State/Territory which holds jurisdiction over industrial relations matters.

## Reliability of estimates

Estimates from the ID collection are subject to non-sampling error. Non-sampling error arises from inaccuracies in collecting, recording and processing the data. Every effort is made to minimise non-sampling error by the careful design of questionnaires and by efficient data collection and processing procedures.



## Data comparability over time

Changes which have affected data comparability over time are discussed in Chapter 26 of [Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-sources-methods/labour-statistics-concepts-sources-and-methods/2021\)](#).

## Related publications

Users may also wish to refer to the following publications which are available from the ABS web site:

- [Australian Labour Market Statistics \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6105.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6105.0);
- [Characteristics of Employment, Australia \(/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/characteristics-employment-australia/latest-release\)](#);
- [Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia \(/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/employee-earnings-and-hours-australia/latest-release\)](#) - issued biennially;
- [Labour Force, Australia \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release\)](#) - issued monthly;
- [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release\)](#); and
- [Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/concepts-](#)

## Rounding

Where estimates have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals.

## Suppression of data

Some data may be suppressed to prevent disclosure, either directly or by inference, of information relating to individual organisations. These data have been replaced by the symbol 'np', but are included in totals.

## Glossary

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#### Cause of dispute

Cause of dispute statistics relate to the reported main cause of stoppage of work and not necessarily all causes that may have been responsible for the stoppage of work. For these reasons, the statistics do not reflect the relative importance of all causes of disputes as perceived by both employers and employees. The causes are classified from information supplied by employers and according to standards determined by the International Labour Organisation.

Disputes are initially classified according to whether a dispute occurred during a process of workplace/enterprise bargaining. A process of workplace/enterprise bargaining refers to the negotiations that take place between an employer and their employees (or their representatives), in reaching an agreement over pay and employment conditions.

Disputes not related to a process of workplace/enterprise bargaining include:

- disputes relating to award negotiations; and
- disputes relating to the content or application of an existing agreement (and do not seek to amend or terminate the agreement).

Disputes are then further classified according to the main cause of the dispute, as follows:

#### Enterprise Bargaining (EB) related:

Remuneration: Disputes relating to wages and other forms of remuneration, e.g. increase/decrease in wages, allowances, entitlements and superannuation.

Employment conditions: Disputes relating to hours of work, leave, non-remuneration related benefits, and other general employment conditions, e.g. increase/decrease in hours, distribution of hours and holiday and leave provisions.

Other EB related: Causes other than Remuneration or Employment conditions, including job security and other causes relating to a process of workplace/enterprise bargaining, e.g. pattern bargaining strikes, disputes where employees refuse to enter into enterprise bargaining negotiations.

#### Non-EB related:

Remuneration: As above.

Employment conditions: As above.

**Health and safety:** Disputes concerning physical working conditions, safety issues and workers' compensation provisions, e.g. accidents, protective clothing and equipment, first aid services, uncomfortable working conditions, employee amenities, shortage or poor distribution of equipment or material, condition of equipment, and arduous physical tasks.

**Job security:** Disputes concerning issues relating to job security, e.g. retrenchment of employees, downsizing, restructuring, use of contractors, outsourcing, re-classification of the workforce, and market conditions within the relevant industry.

**Managerial policy:** Disputes relating to the decisions and policies of line managers, e.g. disciplinary matters, suspensions, personal disagreement, discrimination, decisions that impact upon work and family issues, docking of pay, fines, production limits or quotas, principles of promotion or filling positions, and work practices.

**Union issues:** Disputes concerning the alleged anti-union attitude of the employer, inter-union and intra-union disputes (e.g. demarcation disputes), sympathy stoppages in support of employees in another industry, and recognition of union activities.

**Other non-EB related:** Disputes that cannot be ascribed to any other category, e.g. political protests.

## **Disputes**

An industrial dispute is defined as a state of disagreement over an issue or group of issues between an employer and its employees, which results in employees ceasing work. Industrial disputes comprise strikes, which are a withdrawal from work by a group of employees; and lockouts, which are a refusal by an employer or group of employers to permit some or all of their employees to work.

### **Disputes which ended during the reference period**

Disputes which ended during the period encompasses those disputes which:

- started in a previous period and ended in the reference period; and
- began and ended in the reference period.

### **Disputes which occurred during the reference period**

Disputes which occurred during the period encompasses those disputes which:

- started in a previous period and ended in the reference period;
- began and ended in the reference period;
- began in the reference period and continued into the next period; and
- started prior to the reference period and continued past the reference period.

## **Employees**

Employees refers to wage and salary earners only. Excluded are persons who are self-employed (e.g. building sub-contractors, owner-drivers of trucks) and employers.

**Employees directly involved:** Employees who actually participated in the dispute in order to enforce or resist a demand or to express a grievance.

**Employees indirectly involved:** Employees who were stood down at the location where the stoppage occurred, but who were not themselves parties to the dispute. Employees who were stood down at locations other than those where the disputes occurred are excluded.

**Employees newly involved:** For a new dispute, comprises all employees who are involved and, for an ongoing dispute, those involved for the first time.

Total employees involved: Comprises employees newly involved and, for an ongoing dispute, those who continue to be involved. Total employees involved for any period of time is obtained by adding together the number of employees involved in each dispute for the period.

## Industry

Industry is classified according to the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification \(ANZSIC\), 2006 \(/statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-industrial-classification-anzsic/latest-release\)](https://statistics.classifications.australian-and-new-zealand-standard-industrial-classification-anzsic/latest-release).

Data classified by industry is primarily based on the main activity of the employer of the employees involved in the dispute at the location or site where the industrial dispute occurred.

Metal product etc manufacturing comprises the following ANZSIC 2006 subdivisions: Primary metal and metal product manufacturing; Fabricated metal product manufacturing; Transport equipment manufacturing; and Machinery and equipment manufacturing.

Other industries comprises those industries not included in the specified industry groupings, i.e. Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Electricity, gas, water and waste services; Wholesale trade; Retail trade; Accommodation and food services; Information media and telecommunications; Financial and insurance services; Rental, hiring and real estate services; Professional, scientific and technical services; Administrative and support services; Public administration and safety; Arts and recreation services; and Other services.

## Reason work resumed

Reason work resumed statistics relate to the reason for ending the stoppage of work as reported and not necessarily to the reason(s) for settling all matters in dispute. Therefore, they do not reflect the relative importance of the work of various industrial tribunals operating under state and federal legislation. The classification of Reason work resumed is as follows:

Negotiation without intervention of a third party: Negotiation between the parties involved, or their representative without the intervention or assistance of authorities constituted under state or federal industrial legislation, and without mediation.

State legislation: Intervention or assistance of an industrial authority or authorities created by, or constituted under, state industrial/workplace relations legislation. Disputes that are referred to a mediator by a state industrial tribunal, either on a voluntary or compulsory basis, are included under 'Mediation' (except in instances where mediation is directed and a return to work ordered).

Federal legislation: Intervention or assistance of the Fair Work Commission (FWC). Disputes that are referred to a mediator by FWC, either on a voluntary or compulsory basis, are included under 'Mediation' (except in instances where mediation is directed and a return to work ordered).

Pre-determined return to work: Disputes for which a return to work is determined prior to the industrial action, e.g. when employees decide to go out on strike for a pre-determined period of 24 hours.

Resumption without negotiation: Disputes in which employees decide to return to work without the dispute being resolved, and without any negotiations having taken place to prompt the return, e.g. stop-work meetings, and disputes where employees decide to return to work to avoid further loss of earnings or for other reasons. This category may include some disputes which are settled subject to subsequent negotiation, such as industrial court hearings.

Mediation: Disputes that are settled through the assistance of a mediator, either voluntarily or as directed by a state or federal industrial tribunal, e.g. FWC.

Other reasons: Disputes whose settlement cannot be ascribed to any other category, e.g. replacing employees on

strike or locked out, permanent closure of business, and dismissal or resignation of employees.

### Working days lost

Working days lost refers to working days lost by employees directly and indirectly involved in the dispute.

### Working days lost per employee involved

The average number of working days lost per employee involved in the dispute, calculated by dividing the number of working days lost in the dispute by the number of employees involved (both directly and indirectly).

### Working days lost per thousand employees

Working days lost per thousand employees are calculated for a quarterly period by dividing the total number of working days lost in the period by the total number of employees in the Australian labour force in the period (obtained from the ABS Labour Force Survey (LFS)) and multiplying by 1,000. LFS employee estimates are revised quarterly, through quarterly rebenchmarking. As a result, estimates of working days lost per thousand employees are also subject to revision.

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## Quality declaration - summary

### Institutional environment

For information on the institutional environment of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), including the legislative obligations of the ABS, financing and governance arrangements, and mechanisms for scrutiny of ABS operations, please see [ABS Institutional Environment \(/about/legislation-and-policy/abs-institutional-environment\)](#).

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### Relevance

The Industrial Disputes (ID) collection produces quarterly statistics on the number of industrial disputes, employees involved in industrial disputes, working days lost and working days lost per thousand employees where at least ten working days are lost as a result of the dispute. The following types of industrial disputes are within the scope of the ID collection:

- unauthorised stopwork meetings
- general strikes
- sympathetic strikes (e.g. strikes in support of a group of workers already on strike)
- political or protest strikes
- rotating or revolving strikes (i.e. strikes which occur when workers at different locations take turns to stop work)
- unofficial strikes
- work stoppages initiated by employers (e.g. lockouts).

Excluded from the scope of the collection are work-to-rules, go-slows and bans (e.g. overtime bans). Also excluded are effects of disputes on locations other than where the stoppages occurred, such as stand downs because of lack of materials, disruption of transport services and power cuts.

Statistics for industrial disputes which occurred during the quarter are available by industry and state. Statistics for industrial disputes which ended during the quarter are available by cause of dispute, working days lost per employee involved and reason work resumed.

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### Timeliness

Industrial disputes data for disputes which occurred during the quarter are released approximately nine weeks after the end of the reference quarter, with the exception of estimates for each December quarter which, due to the Christmas and New Year period, are released approximately 10 weeks after the reference quarter. The release of data for disputes which ended during the quarter is lagged by one quarter. Data relating to disputes which ended in the quarter cannot be finalised until two months have elapsed without further industrial action on the same issue taking place.

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## Accuracy

Each month, a list is compiled of organisations whose employees were involved in industrial disputes. Disputes are identified primarily through listings obtained from industrial relations commissions and media reports. The Industrial Disputes collection is a census of all in-scope disputes, although some small disputes may not be identified through the sources available. Due to the limitations on identification of disputes, the statistics should not be regarded as an exact measure of the extent of industrial disputation.

Estimates from the Industrial Disputes collection are subject to non-sampling error. Non-sampling error arises from inaccuracies in collecting, recording and processing the data. Every effort is made to minimise non-sampling error by the careful design of questionnaires and by efficient data collection and processing procedures.

Revisions may be made to quarterly data as a result of disputes being identified after release of data for that quarter or as a result of correcting errors in previously reported data.

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## Coherence

The Industrial Disputes collection was compiled on a quarterly basis from 1913 and on a monthly basis from 1970 to 2003. Quarterly statistics have been released from March quarter 2004, but collection of data from providers remains on a monthly cycle. The monthly data have been converted to a quarterly basis back to 1985.

Revised classifications for 'Cause of dispute' and 'Reason work resumed' (formerly 'Method of settlement') were introduced in the March quarter 2004. In addition, the 'Duration of dispute' classification was renamed 'Working days lost per employee involved'. Statistics based on these classifications are available from March quarter 2003 onwards.

The ABS uses standard classifications to facilitate data comparability across statistical collections. In the Industrial Disputes collection employers are classified to industry using the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification \(ANZSIC\), 2006 \(/statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-industrial-classification-anzsic/latest-release\)](#).

Working days lost per thousand employees are calculated using estimates of the total number of employees in the Australian labour force obtained from the ABS Labour Force Survey. Labour Force Survey employee estimates are revised periodically. As a result, estimates of working days lost per thousand employees may also be subject to revision.

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## Interpretability

Industrial Disputes, Australia contains Explanatory Notes and a Glossary which provide further information about data sources, terminology and other technical aspects of the series.

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## Accessibility



Industrial Disputes, Australia is available from the ABS website and as downloadable Excel data files for time series data.

For further information about these and related statistics, contact the Customer Assistance Service via the ABS website [Contact Us \(/about/contact-us\)](#) page. The [ABS Privacy Policy \(/about/legislation-and-policy/privacy/privacy-abs\)](#) outlines how the ABS will handle any personal information that you provide to us.

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## Abbreviations

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANZSIC	Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification
EB	Enterprise Bargaining
FWC	Fair Work Commission
ID	Industrial Disputes
LFS	Labour Force Survey

